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THE TWENTIETH PARTY CONGRESS
OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION (KPSU)
AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE SED / KP

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Situation as of 1 June 1956

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Prefatory Note

The events of the Twentieth Party Congress of the KPSU were discussed in this report only insofar as they have perceptible effect on the SED/KP policies.

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Introduction:

Four years after the last KPSU Party Congress, the Twentieth Party Congress was held in Moscow from 14 to 25 February 1956; it was attended by guests from other communist parties as well as by SED/KP functionaries. The SED/KP delegation was led by Walter ULBRICHT, Otto GROTEWOHL and Max REIMANN.

Immediately following STALIN's death (5 March 1953) the KPSU began abolishing measures taken by STALIN in regard to policies concerning home and economic affairs, nationalities and foreign affairs, and reducing STALIN's influence also in the ideological field. This trend was openly followed at the Party Congress. Criticism of STALIN became much sharper.

The consequences drawn from STALIN's mistakes will result in a change of political methods in the future.

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I. The Outstanding Events of
the Twentieth Party Congress

In the first place, all those changes in internal party life, party history and party ideology will be mentioned which will also affect the other communist parties in the world.

1. Internal Party Life

As early as 16 April 1953, immediately following STALIN's death, the cult of personality was condemned in an official party publication, and collective leadership was proclaimed which had been practised already during the years following the October Revolution. The other communist parties agreed. The Party Congress strongly advocated this principle and frankly admitted that there had been no collective leadership in the KPSU for more than twenty years. In the secret session of the Party Congress on 25 February, KHRUSHCHEV discussed the mistakes STALIN made in his decisions for the other communist parties concerning the ~~interior~~ and foreign policies and also in regard to the field of ideology.

2. Party History

Of special importance is the criticism of the "Brief Instruction Course on the History of the KPSU", hitherto the basis of world communism. KHRUSHCHEV declared that this book was not based on historical facts. He demanded the compilation of a popular marxist manual of the party's history, based on facts. Furthermore, MIKOJAN and the historian PANKRATOVA (f) attacked the entire history written under STALIN, and the method, applied during his regime, of shifting the responsibility for party failures to so-called "people's enemies". The abandonment of those STALIN methods should also be mentioned here, which resulted in the "purges" of 1936/38. STALIN's theory was also openly repudiated which speaks of the aggravating of the class fight after the dictatorship of the proletariat was established, and which was used as a basis for the purge.

Considering the import of these declarations, the number of purge victims is insignificant who have so far been publicly rehabilitated.

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3. Ideology

The thesis of the "individual road toward socialism" to be taken by each country, which STALIN had ^{in Summer of 1948} condemned as being "inimical to the party" and "trotskyist", was not mentioned at the Party Congress; instead, the communist parties throughout the world were officially -- in an even farther reaching form ^{granted} -- the possibility to begin the transition to socialism in a parliamentary-democratic manner. However, KHRUSHCHEV explained in his report, a solid parliamentary majority could be obtained only on the basis of the revolutionary mass upheaval of the proletariat. But in those countries where capitalism was still powerful, and where the capitalists still controlled a powerful military and police organization, the transition to socialism would have to be worked by vicious class fighting, by revolutionary fight.

The "new" thesis of the transition to socialism, therefore, does not mean the abolishment of revolutionary means; it merely means tactical adjustment to the present political situation in the world, and especially in Europe. The propaganda made in favor of the progress of socialism in the parliamentary way is supposed to make it easier to form so-called "Popular Front Governments" in western countries, in order to bring about, in the "cold way", a revolutionary reorganization of the social order. Wherever in western countries the resistance against such policies would be strong, the communists would try to put socialism into practice by the usual revolutionary means.

Seen in connection with this thesis of "the individual road toward socialism", the abandonment by the Party Congress of STALIN's theory of the inevitable decay of capitalism gains very definite importance. The assertions STALIN made in this respect in his book "Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR" cannot, according to MIKOJAN, explain the complicated and inconsistent effects of modern capitalism, or the fact that capitalistic production has grown in many countries since the war.

As the theory, enunciated by STALIN, of the crisis of capitalism is merely a practical consequence of the doctrines of MARX and LENIN, such ideas are apt to undermine the very basis of communism.

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II. The Effects of the Twentieth
Party Congress Upon the SED/KP

1. Effects in the political field

Shortly after the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress, meetings of leading SED/KP party organs took place in the Soviet sector of Berlin, namely:

the 23rd session of the KP Party Executive Committee,

17/18 March 1956;

" 26th " " " SED Central Committee, 22 Mar 56;

" 3rd SED Party Conference, 24-30 March 1956;

" "West Conference" of the SED/KP, 30 March 1956.

The 3rd Party Conference was attended by 2,325 delegates from the Soviet zone, and 517 functionaries from the Federal Republic and from West Berlin as "guests". The "West Conference", which dealt with problems of the all-German activists of the SED/KP, was attended by the 517 KP functionaries who had participated in the 3rd Party Conference, by members of the KP Labor Office in East Berlin, and by a great number of functionaries of the All-German Department in the SED Central Committee, for example, the SED instructors for political and organizational guidance of the KP in the Federal Republic.

At these meetings, the participants were apprised of the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress; its political effects on the SED/KP policies were analyzed, and the guiding principles for the future communist policies in Germany were worked out. No new political aims were proclaimed, only drastic changes in the tactical methods to establish socialism in Germany. While at the 2nd SED Party Conference in July 1952 a "national fight for liberation in West Germany" had been demanded, and in the communist "program of national reunification of Germany" in November 1952 the revolutionary overthrow of the Federal Government, the change the SED and KP made in October 1955 became apparent by the resolutions they adopted at the 25th session of the KP Party Executive Committee. These resolutions no longer called up for direct revolutionary overthrow of the Federal Government, but demanded the creation of a "democratic People's movement" with the mission to set up a "new democratic order" on the basis of socialized

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major industries, large estates and banks, all this as a pre-requisite for the reunification.

The new guiding principles of communist policies in Germany, based on the results of the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress, not only continue this development, they also say clearly that a "revolutionary overthrow of the Adenauer regime" would be a mistake, and that socialism can be put into practice in the Federal Republic by parliamentary means.

The following guiding principles are worth mentioning;

a) Socialism -- a World System

Starting from the resolution adopted by the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress which says that socialism has spread beyond the boundaries of a nation and has become a world system, while capitalism has proven incapable of staying the course world history was taking, the SED Central Committee stated at its 26th session that socialism had become the century's guiding principle, and that the number of workers adopting it was growing throughout the world.

In regard to the "change in the world's power relations", Walter ULBRICHT stated at the Third Party Conference that the Soviet zone was closely united with the socialist camp because of the success achieved there in building up socialism, and that it could never be excluded from the developments of that camp. Karl SCHIRDEWAN added that because of this close connection socialism could be successfully practised in the Soviet zone.

b) All-Germany -- a Socialist State

Referring to the Twentieth Party Congress, ULBRICHT declared at the Third Party Conference that the development of the Soviet-occupied zone since 1945 could not simply be copied in the Federal Republic. At present the SED was not working out socialistic demands for all of Germany, but would, at the time of reunification, insist upon the protection of the socialistic achievements in the Soviet-occupied zone, as a prerequisite for peaceful and democratic development throughout Germany. The SED (he said) stated quite openly that their aim -- socialistic All-Germany -- also corresponded with the conditions of society.

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In the struggle between the two systems at present prevailing in Germany, the SED/KP -- GROTEWOHL, ULBRICHT and REIMANN declared -- was not only advocating peaceful competition, but also approach and cooperation of both states in order to reunite both parts of Germany; however, there cannot and may not exist "ideological co-existence with imperialists". One cannot simply speak of co-existence of the two divided German states. The SED would struggle to close the gap and to reunite both German states. The prerequisite for a peaceful reunification is the unity of action between workers' parties and organizations in both Germanies.

Otto GROTEWOHL, speaking before the Party Conference, voiced the hope that the historical new and higher life which was coming into being in the Soviet zone through the introduction of socialism in consequence of the history-forming role of the workers' and peasants' power, would take its course with the same historical cogency also in the other half of the German nation and, therefore, throughout Germany.

c. Revolution is not the only means to achieve socialism

Referring to the decisions of the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress, ULBRICHT also stated at the Party Conference, that the individual nations would abandon the capitalistic system under different conditions and at different times; the prerequisites for the change to socialism would gradually mature in each country under different conditions and at different times.

However, considering the different forms of transition to socialism, it would always be necessary (as REIMANN pointed out at the 23rd meeting of the KP Party Executive Committee on 17 and 18 March 1956) to safeguard the political control of the state by the working class, led by its progressive members.

The resolutions adopted at this meeting termed wrong such demands of the "program of national reunification of Germany" as "revolutionary overthrow of the Adenauer Regime", since such slogans, considering the at present prevailing conditions, and considering the maturity degree of the classes in the Federal Republic, would prevent a rally of the masses of workers and of all other democratic powers.

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The draft of a KP speech on the evaluation of the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress says that there is no such thing as "peaceful growth of socialism". The change to socialism by parliamentary means could not be performed by parliamentarians, "... by negotiating with the bourgeoisie ... as so-called workers' governments tried in the past (for example in Saxony and Thuringia in 1923)", but solely through the "struggle of the workers' class together with the working peasants under the guidance of the Workers' Party" could the parliamentary majority be obtained, and could "parliament be made a tool of the people's will", and "the most important production means be turned into property of the people". The "fighting measures of the proletariat" to be taken to that purpose, would therefore "in the first place depend on the strength and the resistance of the classes which ruled previously".

This as well as the afore-mentioned statements made at the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress show that the communists are well aware of the fact that they have little chance of assuming control without revolution in the Federal Republic, where all powers loyal to the constitution are united in the defense against the communist desire for power.

d. Majority of the Working Class in Parliament
Only Through Unity of Action with the SPD

Referring especially to the KPSU appeal to the social-democratic parties in all countries "to cooperate for the sake of peace, democracy and social progress", ULBRICHT declared that the SED was willing to negotiate and to cooperate with the SPD on an extensive basis.

According to what REIMANN said at the 23rd meeting of the KP Party Executive Committee, the KP will make no conditions for the cooperation with the SPD since it had now become a vital issue for all workers in the Federal Republic, and for their parties and trade unions, that the labor organizations bring out the points they have in common. SPD and KP have in common their desire for disarmament, for the struggle against the machinations of the fascist and military organizations in the Federal Republic, and their resistance against the incorporation of the Federal Republic in the NATO. Therefore, it was possible to safeguard peace and to unify Germany only

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if the representatives of labor parties and labor organizations throughout Germany would take common action in order to bring about, by parliamentary means, a truly democratic majority, capable of putting into practice fundamental social reforms and of carrying out peace policies.

The sole possibility to find a new starting point from which to embark on a development of domestic policies favorable for the ideas of the KP, was to overthrow the present Federal Government by parliamentary means, after the next Bundestag elections. A new basis for mutual reunion policies and for the forming of a "wide-spread popular movement against militarism and war" could be found only if it should be possible to establish an SPD government or an SPD/FDP coalition. Therefore, the KP would have to develop new forms of mass agitation and "tackle the task of unity of action in a new way". The point was to prove to the social-democrats that the KP had no wish to give the social-democrats advice, and that it was not intended "to conquer the socialdemocrats", but that the communist desired unity of action with the SPD merely in order to overthrow the present Federal Government.

On the common basis formed by current political problems, the KP would be the first "to push aside everything that separates us and to meet the SPD comrades halfway" in order "to overcome the still existing prejudice and obstruction". The unity of action of the working class would strengthen SPD and KP "at the costs of the reactionaries".

The German communist party obtained from the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress the confirmation of the policies it had followed, especially since October 1955, and the Congress was the starting point for the meticulous application of tactical methods to establish socialism throughout all-Germany.

These new guiding principles are already being fully applied to communist current policies. The central point is the desire of the communists to establish connections with the SPD of every type in order to achieve a unity of action among the working class. In particular, the SED/KP is trying to get in touch with responsible functionaries at all levels of the social-democratic party organizations.

During the procedure to establish the unconstitutionality of the KPD, the KP tried to use the decisions of the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress to their own advantage; in two written

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pleadings dated 14 March and 5 April 1956, they showed the general development of international policies and German domestic policies as well as the change in political tactics started at the Twentieth Party Congress, and they offered in evidence the resolutions of the Twentieth Party Congress, and applied for rehearing. The Federal Constitutional Court has not yet entertained application.

A thorough change in the employment of communist auxiliary organizations is being made in consequence of the communist Popular Front policy. It is planned to dissolve the existing auxiliary organizations and instead to establish new organizations whose political and organizational guidance will be effected by the communists with even greater circumspection. It seems doubtful, however, whether the communists will be generally able to conceal their auxiliary organizations better than before.

2. Effects on internal party developments

As at the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress, a "secret meeting" took place also during the 3rd Party Conference of the SED at which the speech KHRUSHCHEV held during the secret session of the Party Congress was read; the same happened during the SED/KP "West Conference".

Due to the criticism of STALIN and of his theoretical writings the SED/KP leaders face considerable difficulties because of the perceptible unrest and dismay among lower-ranking functionaries and SED/KP members caused by the unscrupulous tactics of the German KP leaders in swinging into line in regard to the condemnation of STALIN.

The attitude of ULBRICHT and his followers after the Twentieth Party Congress (STALIN being viciously criticized, but no steps being taken against prominent Stalinists like ULBRICHT himself) resulted in such great dissatisfaction within the SED that the Politbureau considered it necessary to publish -- for example in "Neues Deutschland" of 29 April 1956 -- a statement concerning the problem of the cult of personality. In this statement they deny that persons had been glorified in the SED, and explain that "the emphasis put on the role of leading and particularly outstanding labor leaders like Wilhelm PIECK, Otto GROTEWOHL and Walter ULBRICHT" has "nothing to do with the cult of personality", but "has been an important symbol and a beneficial and uniting element in the

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relations between the party and the masses of the working class and of the people, under the conditions of the party's development and maturing process in the complicated situation arising from the continuous attacks on the part of the enemies upon the socialistic movement".

This attitude of the Politbureau will hardly pacify the members, especially since the accumulation of power in the person of ULBRICHT was obvious to the majority of the SED and KPD members.

It is significant for the extent of such strivings that the Politbureau took a stand in public against party members desiring that measures be taken against prominent party functionaries (arrest, exclusion from leading party organs) as had been done by other parties in the East Bloc nations (for example in Poland). It is also noteworthy that the Polish Communist Party -- which has made far-reaching changes in its own organization after the Twentieth Party Congress -- criticizes the SED in public for not having drawn the consequences necessarily arising from the new situation.

In accordance with a decision of the KP Party Executive Committee, meetings of party activists are held in all Laender of the Federal Republic to explain the new political tactics. The contributions to the discussions, as well as the course of the discussions, show plainly the profound effect of the condemnation of STALIN, as well as the confusion and dissatisfaction largely prevailing within the KP. While the speakers, upon instruction of the Party Executive Committee, concentrated on the problems of unity of action, coexistence and peaceful transition to socialism, most discussion partners were concerned with the cult of personality and the dependence on SED and KPSU. There were tumultuous scenes. Accompanied by general laughter, ULBRICHT was ridiculed by the participants in a meeting of a KP Land Secretariate -- unthinkable a few months ago.

The KP Party Executive Committee appointed a committee to investigate the cases of members excluded from the party in the course of the past years, as well as other measures taken against party members.

3. Effects on SED/KP Tactics Concerning
Bundestag Elections in 1957

SED and KP embarked on their preparations for the Bundestag elections in 1957. The party bases its tactics on the unity

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of action of the working class, putting into practice on that basis the "Popular Front Policies" revived by the Twentieth Party Congress. Therefore, all considerations of the communists are concerned with the ^{bringing about the} ~~fall~~ of the present Federal Government. In their election campaign they will disregard their own advantage and will concentrate all efforts on the exploitation of oppositional trends in the Federal Republic. Therefore, the KP strives for the co-ordination of all those powers from FDP to SPD which are opposed to the policies of the Federal Government and to the CDU.

In the opinion of prominent functionaries, cooperation with all other oppositional groups would become possible by the fulfilment of the following demands:

- opposition to the Federal Chancellor personally,
- revision of the Paris Agreements,
- reduction of armament for the benefit of social duties,
- increase of the East-West trade,
- acceleration of international negotiations.

In this connection, the KP sets much value on the opinion voiced during various meetings of SPD and DGB Land organizations against the Federal Chancellor and against "remilitarization", and in favor of continuation of the St. Paul's Church Movement.

4. Effects on Development of Soviet Zone Home Policies

The most remarkable event at the 3rd Party Conference concerning the home policy development in the Soviet zone was the far-going criticism of Soviet zone state organs. In particular, GROTEWOHL criticized the methods of the State Security Service and of the "Organization of Justice" in the Soviet zone, the working methods of the "People's Representatives", and the system of functionaries in State Administration; he demanded "development of democracy on a broad basis as a prerequisite for the triumphant fulfilment of the Second Five-Year Plan". The Party Conference stated that the Second Five Year Plan of the Soviet zone had for the first time been coordinated with the Year Plans of all socialist states, so that the Soviet zone was now firmly established in the socialist camp.

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After the Party Conference, leading state functionaries continued to criticize with amazing frankness the "incorrect application of law" by Soviet zone Justice; such criticism has not yet resulted in the discharge of the responsible functionaries, as it did in other East Bloc nations. Instead, measures are being prepared in the Soviet zone to extend the range of functions of the Pursuing Authorities and to adapt them entirely to the conditions in the Soviet Union.

The first result of the activities of the Committee appointed by the SED Central Committee to review the cases of former party members was that the former Soviet zone Minister of Justice Max FECHNER and (according to the SED) 87 other prisoners were pardoned.

The telegraphic address sent to the KPSU by the 3rd Party Conference, and an appeal of the National Council of the "National Front" to the Soviet zone government were the first occasions where the social order in the Soviet zone was termed a "People's Democracy". This statement is remarkable insofar as it has always been asserted in the Soviet zone that the "order of a People's Democracy" had not yet been achieved, and that this aim had been postponed because of the division in Germany. That the Soviet zone is nevertheless called a "People's Democracy" indicates that emphasis is laid on its incorporation in the system of East Bloc nations, and on the finality of the created conditions, regardless of whether or not Germany will be reunited. Simultaneously the 3rd Party Conference took measures to adjust the Soviet zone state organization more than ever to the Soviet conditions (strict centralization; the right of higher parliaments to direct lower parliaments; possibility to recall deputies).

III. Evaluation

There is no doubt that the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress has caused important changes to be made in the methods of communist policies, and has abolished many important measures and writings by STALIN. One may term it the most important meeting held since LENIN's death, as MIKOJAN put it. However, this statement must not lead to the overrating of the Party Congress and its effects. The changes made at the Twentieth Party Congress remain within the boundaries of

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political methodology. They have no effect on the political aims of the communists, and they do not change the basis of the original communist party and the state system from which STALIN had deviated. This is evident by the most notable events of the Twentieth Party Congress:

rejection of the cult of personality is followed by "collective wisdom of the Central Committee";

despite the refutation of many of STALIN's theoretical writings, the "leading role of the party" remains untouched;

although a few former party leaders and victims of STALIN were rehabilitated, TROTZKI, BUCHARIN, ~~SINOWIEV~~ ZINOVIEV, and the numerous victims of the great purge are not mentioned.

On the contrary, the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress shows the intention of the Soviet leaders to organize home and economic policies in the Soviet Union in a more modern and more rational fashion, and to abandon the system which under STALIN proved unable to enforce communism in western countries.

The effects of the Twentieth KPSU Party Congress apparent already now in the East Bloc nations and in the Soviet zone indicate that the Soviet leaders have, by applying new methods, taken upon themselves great risks for the solidity of their own power sphere. It is not yet discernible to what extent they have eliminated this danger and how they will compensate it in the long run by the advantages the new methods may offer them through the strengthening of communist influence in the western world.

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